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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1569  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5053  
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6220  
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0094  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000793

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNUC](#) [UN](#) [RS](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIA IN BURMA: UN ROLES; NUCLEAR COOPERATION;  
BILATERAL RELATIONS

Classified By: CDA Dinger; Section 1.4 (b) & (d)

Russia an interlocutor with the Burmese regime

¶1. (C) Charge's Oct. 7 courtesy call on Russian Ambassador to Burma Mikhail Mgelandze included discussion of current UN efforts to influence events in Burma and a sketch of Russia's activities in country. Many political observers in Rangoon believe Russia has more access to influential Government of Burma (GoB) officials than most in the diplomatic community. Mgelandze acknowledged he has a degree of access, but he proposed that no outside power, not Russia, certainly not India (where Mgelandze has spent much of his career), and not even China has the sway to influence the Burmese generals on core security issues.

The UN and Burma: a Russian perspective

¶2. (C) Mgelandze reported that Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win met with UN Special Representative for Burma Gambari on the margins of the FM's visit to New York for the UNGA. Russia understands the two discussed all five topics on Gambari's announced agenda for Burma and achieved some progress. Thus, Russia believes Gambari intends to return to Burma within the next month or so to continue his mission. Mgelandze predicts the next Gambari visit will include a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, if ASSK permits that, and very possibly an appointment with Senior General Than Shwe. Mgelandze is less confident about a visit to Burma by SYG Ban in December, noting that public statements from New York indicate any such SYG visit will depend on future circumstances.

Russia lobbying GoB on UN issues

¶3. (C) Mgelandze said he has been raising with GoB ministers that it is in Burma's interest to be responsive to the UN agenda. That includes organizing internationally acceptable elections in 2010, and allowing UN monitoring of same. Russia has also suggested the GoB should release more political prisoners, though Mgelandze noted the GoB claims all current prisoners have violated various laws and, thus, are not "political." Mgelandze said he has advocated dialogue between the GoB and opposition elements, including ASSK; but he added that if ASSK wants a meaningful role for herself in Burma's political future she must accept the Burmese military's own important political role. Mgelandze suggested

ASSK's past acknowledgment of the Burmese military's inevitable role was "weak." Russia accepts that in Asia political evolution is often slow, deliberate, but see that as better than sudden movement that could easily destabilize.

Mgeladze made clear: "Russia does not want a disintegrated Burma."

No aid, some commerce, comments on nuclear coop

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¶4. (C) Mgelandze acknowledged a bilateral Russia-Burma nuclear-cooperation agreement signed in 2006; but he said nothing has come of it yet, since the intent - to build a civilian nuclear-power plant similar to one Russia is constructing in southern India - is purely a commercial deal and the Burmese have not come up with the necessary funding. Also, the GoB would need to negotiate an additional protocol with the IAEA. Asked about media reports that Russia is training thousands of Burmese in nuclear science, Mgelandze said a program begun within the last two or three years has provided Russian-language training to about a thousand Burmese at a school near Mandalay. (Note: There are suggestions that the students are young military officers, though Mgelandze made no such mention. The "near Mandalay" location have been an oblique reference to the Defense Services Academy and/or the Defense Services Technical Academy, both in Pyin Oo Lwin near Mandalay. End note.) The students travel to Russia for tertiary studies in a range of disciplines, "not just physics." Mgelandze implied that the GoB funds the education, saying that Russia provides "no aid" to Burma these days, not even humanitarian assistance.

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Russia is now "very pragmatic" when it comes to aid, and Burma doesn't rise high enough in Moscow's calculations. Mgelandze said that, with the demise of the Soviet Union and economic difficulties in the 1990s, Russia halved its diplomatic presence in Rangoon (now 11 Moscow-based) and eliminated past cultural and aid programs. He added that Moscow has no intention to reverse that course.

Comment

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¶5. (C) Some Rangoon observers suggest the Burmese generals see Russia as a potential counterweight to China, India, even the U.S. Mgelandze observed that, after Cyclone Nargis last May, it was obvious the generals saw American warships off the Burma coast as an invasion threat, not a helping hand. While Mgelandze in the conversation with Charge was very likely under-stating the Russia-Burma relationship, it also seems likely that, as described, Russia's interest in Burma is relatively modest these days. The Russian embassy in Rangoon, built in the days of the USSR, is cavernous but appears almost eerily under-occupied.

DINGER